

SUPPLEMENTAL AMENDMENT UNDER 35 U.S.C. § 1.111
Appln. No. 10/003,415

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions and listings of claims in the application:

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended): A powders-affixed nonwoven fabric prepared, as a starting material for said powders-affixed nonwoven fabric, only from a powders-containing fiber web comprising powder materials and fine short fibers having a fiber diameter of 4 µm or less and a fiber length of 3 mm or less, wherein said powder materials and said fine short fibers are in a dispersed state in said powders-containing fiber web, said powders-containing fiber web being formed by a method other than a wet-laid method, said fine short fibers consist of island components remaining after removing a sea component from islands-in-sea type fibers, or fibers derived from mechanically dividable fibers, and said fine short fibers are bonded by a fusion thereof.

2. (original): : The powders-affixed nonwoven fabric according to claim 1, wherein an average particle size of the powder materials is 50 µm or less.

3. (original): : The powders-affixed nonwoven fabric according to claim 1, wherein a mass ratio of the fine short fibers with respect to a whole mass of the powders-affixed nonwoven fabric is 1 to 40 mass %.

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4. (original): The powders-affixed nonwoven fabric according to claim 1, wherein an adhesion rate of substances adhered to said powder-affixed nonwoven fabric is 0.5 mass % or less.

5. (canceled).

6. (original): The powders-affixed nonwoven fabric according to claim 1, wherein the fine short fibers are formed from one or more organic components.

7. (currently amended): A process for manufacturing a powders-affixed nonwoven fabric comprising the steps of:

ejecting aggregates of fine short fibers having a fiber diameter of 4 μm or less and a fiber length of 3 mm or less, or a group of the aggregates, and/or mechanically dividable fibers capable of generating fine short fibers having a fiber diameter of 4 μm or less and a fiber length of 3 mm or less, or aggregates of the mechanically dividable fibers, together with powder materials, from a nozzle into a gas by an action of a compressed gas, to thereby divide the aggregates of the fine short fibers or the group thereof into the fine short fibers, and/or divide the mechanically dividable fibers or the aggregates thereof into the fine short fibers, and disperse the resulting fine short fibers and the powder materials;

collecting the dispersed fine short fibers and the powder materials to form a powders-containing fiber web; and affixing the powder materials by a fusion of the fine short fibers, while

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forming a nonwoven fabric from the powders-containing fiber web to obtain the powders-affixed nonwoven fabric.

8. (original): The process according to claim 7, wherein bundled aggregates of fine short fibers are supplied to the nozzle.

9. (original): The process according to claim 7, wherein before supplying the fine-fibers aggregates or the group thereof, and/or the mechanically dividable fibers or the aggregates thereof to the nozzle, adhered substances are removed from the fine-fibers aggregates or the group thereof, and/or the mechanically dividable fibers or the aggregates thereof.

10. (original): The process according to claim 7, wherein a gas stream supplied to the nozzle is substantially a laminar flow.

11. (original): The process according to claim 7, wherein the fine-fibers aggregates or the group thereof, and/or the mechanically dividable fibers or the aggregates thereof, and the powder materials are ejected from the nozzle and brought into collision with a colliding means placed in front of the nozzle.

12. (currently amended): A sheet material comprising at least one layer of the a powder-affixed nonwoven fabric according to claim 1 prepared from a fiber web comprising powder materials and fine short fibers having a fiber diameter of 4 µm or less and a fiber length

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~~of 3 mm or less in a dispersed state in said powders containing fiber web, said powders containing fiber web being formed by a method other than a wet laid method.~~

13. (original): The sheet material according to claim 12, further comprising a layer free of the powder materials on at least one surface.

14. (currently amended): A process for manufacturing a sheet material comprising the steps of:

ejecting aggregates of fine short fibers having a fiber diameter of $4\mu\text{m}$ or less and fiber length of 3 mm or less, or a group of the aggregates, and/or mechanically dividable fiber capable of generating fine-short fibers having a fiber diameter of $4\mu\text{m}$ or less and a fiber length of 3 mm or less, or aggregates of the mechanically dividable fibers, together with powder materials, from a nozzle into a gas by an action of a compressed gas, to thereby divide the aggregates of the fine short fibers or the group thereof into the fine short fibers, and/or divide the mechanically dividable fibers or the aggregates thereof into the fine short fibers, and disperse the resulting fine short fibers and the powder materials;

collecting the dispersed fine short fibers and the powder materials to form a powders-containing fiber web; and affixing the powder materials by a fusion of the fine short fibers, while forming a nonwoven fabric from the powders-containing fiber web, and at the same time bonding a layer free of the powder materials, to obtain the sheet material containing a powders-affixed nonwoven fabric.